

God's Love Language

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Date: 12 April 2026

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[0 : 0 0] I want to start this morning by thinking, what do you give to someone who has everything? What do you give to someone who already has everything? Maybe you have that rich family member or friend who you struggle to buy birthday presents for everything. The same question could be said about God. What can we possibly give to God that He would enjoy? And that is one of the questions that surprisingly the book of Leviticus answers. Leviticus is the third book in our Bible, in our Old Testament. And just so you know where it fits into the story, God has just rescued His people, Israel, out of Egypt. And He did that not because they deserved it. He did that purely out of grace, through nothing that they had done.

They were slaves in Egypt. They didn't deserve His grace. And yet He miraculously brought them out, rescued them, and gave them these amazing promises, brought them into a covenant relationship with Himself, all because of His promises that He made back in Genesis to Abraham, that He will rescue Israel. And the reason He's going to do that is because He wants, God wants to have a relationship with human beings. He doesn't want to be distant. He wants to come and dwell with us. And it all started with this nation of Israel in the Old Testament. And it was all out of grace, and it was all in fulfillment of God's promises, which is an amazing thing. God wants to dwell with them. He's given them instructions of this tabernacle, this amazing place that He's going to come, and God's presence is going to be with them in their camp. But now that they're in covenant relationship with God, the big question they have is how to respond to everything that God has done. How do you respond to that? What do you do now that God is with you, living with you? How do you live properly in relationship with God?

That's the question they had in Leviticus at the beginning of this book. But it's the same question that we should be asking after Easter. If you think about it, we've just celebrated at Easter. I hope you enjoyed it. Good Friday, Easter Sunday, as we remembered everything that God has done to bring us, you and me, into a real relationship with Him. When God Himself came down as a human to give Himself to us to die so that despite our sin, you and I, sinners, can receive full and unqualified forgiveness and life just like that thief on the cross who did nothing to deserve it. Remember that from Good Friday?

That is what we remembered at Easter. God's amazing actions to rescue us from our sin, to bring us into relationship with Him. How do we respond to that? What can we possibly give back to God after everything He's done for you and me? Well, because of the book of Leviticus, we don't have to guess. God has told us what He likes, what response He most desires from His saved people, and what He likes, the response that God desires from His saved people, in a word, is sacrifice. Sacrifice. Sacrifice is not to earn favor with Him, but because we already have it. And when God's people make sacrifices in our lives in response to His sacrifice for us, He really enjoys that. You could say that sacrifice is God's love language. I don't know if you know what I mean when I say love language. I don't know if you've come across the concept of love languages before, but it's long been recognized, especially in couples therapy, that people receive and give love in different ways.

[4 : 3 3] Different people receive love and feel loved in different ways. We use this a lot in marriage counseling and marriage prep here at St. Mark's. But the idea is, you know, some people will feel loved and express their love through giving gifts. Some people through quality time, some people through words of affirmation, and it's different for different people. And therefore, when it comes to a couple, it's important in a relationship to not just express love the way that is natural for you, but to know how your partner feels loved, what is meaningful to them, and learning to express love in that way as well, in their love language. Well, God has a love language. Did you know that?

And God's love language is sacrifice. That is how God expresses his love for us, and it is how he enjoys us expressing it back to him. Sacrifice is God's love language, and that is why the opening chapters of Leviticus are all about the types of sacrifices that God actually enjoys. I wonder if you noticed, we read chapter 2, but throughout chapter 1 and 2 and 3, there's this repeated phrase. In chapter 1, verse 9, it says, this is an aroma pleasing to the Lord. Did you notice that phrase? Again, in verse 13, this is an aroma pleasing to the Lord. In verse 17, in chapter 2, verse 2, and so it goes on. There's this repeated phrase, an aroma pleasing to the Lord, something that he enjoys. The sacrifices that God's people make actually please him. They make him happy. Now think about that. That's quite amazing. We can do something to make the creator of the cosmos feel happy. That's mind-blowing, that he allows us to make him happy. That we can, there's something we can do that pleases God, and God finds sacrifice, particularly something that he really enjoys. And the reason is because, if you think about it, sacrifice is part of who God is. It's part of his very character. Now think about this. Before he made any of this, before he made the universe, before he made us, before he made Adam and Eve, he knew what would happen. God could see what would happen. He knew that we would fall into sin, and he knew that to rescue us, in order to rescue us and save us and bring him back into relationship with him, a sacrifice from him would be necessary. And that was always part of the plan. Before he ever made the first atom, he knew that to redeem creation, he would need to come and make a sacrifice. That is how he has, in eternity past, been wanting to express his love to us. God has always, in eternity past, planned to express his love to you in sacrifice. And if you've not realized that yet, if you've not realized what God has done so that you can be in a real relationship with him, if that is not, if your eyes have not been opened to that yet, then you need to come to discover Jesus. You need to sign up for that course. The clipboard is here, because this is something you need to know about your God. You cannot live your life without knowing this about the God who made you. So please, if this is new to you, or if you don't realize just what God has done, come to discover Jesus and learn and ask your questions and have them answered. But as I say, in Easter, we were reminded that this is part of who God is. Sacrifice is how God has always planned to express his love for us. It is part of his character. It is in his heart, this idea of sacrifice.

And that means that if you and I are made in his image, that then should be part of who we are too. That should be how we express our love ultimately to one another and ultimately to God through sacrifice.

And I mean, we all know that actually deep down inside, don't we? In a marriage relationship, it's when your partner actually takes time and sacrifices energy and money or whatever it is for you that you feel the most loved. That's how we express love to each other. It is how we naturally, if we're going to think of how we can most express love to another person, it'll be through some form of sacrifice. Well, that is how we express love to God as well, because that is how he has expressed his love to us. That is God's love language. And we express love to God in sacrifice, not just in the Old Testament.

[9 : 40] You know, you think of the word sacrifice, you think Old Testament stuff. That's, you know, lambs and blood and fire and stuff. But no, no, that's not. We've we don't do that anymore. No. Actually, if you look up the word sacrifice in the New Testament, it is there as much as it is in the Old Testament. Now, many of the Old Testament sacrifices, to be fair, are no longer necessary, you'll be pleased to know. And the reason for that is because all of a lot of those sacrifices that had blood and were for the atonement of sins have now been fulfilled in Jesus, to whom they were always meant to point anyway. And because of Jesus, we don't need them anymore. But what we forget is there are other types of sacrifices in the Old Testament as well, not just sacrifices for sin. In fact, in the first few chapters of Leviticus, there are five specifically different type of sacrifices, the grain offering, the burnt offering, the fellowship offering, and we're going to go into a few of them this week and next week. But there are different types of sacrifices. And the New Testament teaches that sacrifice is still something God enjoys from his people. He hasn't changed. He enjoys sacrifice today as much as he ever has. And that is why these opening chapters in Leviticus are so important for us today, because they tell us the kinds of sacrifices that God has always enjoyed. And so that's what we're going to look at. Three types, three kinds of sacrifices that God really enjoys in Leviticus, but also just as much in our lives today. Firstly, the type of sacrifice God enjoys is sacrifices that trust God's provision. Sacrifices that trust

God's provision. One of the first things you notice as you read about these sacrifices is what a waste they were. Did you pick that up? Maybe as you read the first few chapters of Leviticus, you realize just how much resources are being burnt up to nothing in these sacrifices. Perfectly good food being destroyed. Especially in chapter one, the burnt offering, it says that the whole bull or sheep needed to be burnt up to nothing. Think about that. That's a lot of lamb chops.

Okay? That is a lot of juicy sirloin steaks. You know how much that stuff costs at spa and pick and pay? I mean, just a piece like that is like a hundred bucks or whatever. Imagine a whole bull's worth of steak and you come and offer that and you just watch it getting burnt up into smoke. How would you feel see that? And for a people who were living on the subsistence line who did not have savings, that is a huge amount of money. In fact, their savings, their retirement investments were their cattle.

And so that's a huge amount of money going up in smoke. It seems like such a waste. Why would God want that? Why would God enjoy that? It seems like a waste. God doesn't want us to waste things, does he? But if sacrificing these things please God, if they contribute in some way to our relationship with God, then surely they're not a waste. I mean, think about it. If I bought, if I went and picked some flowers out of our garden and put them together and gave them to Jean and she was delighted in them, you wouldn't say to me, what a waste. What a waste of flowers. You know, they could have grown in the garden, but now you've just murdered them. No, you know, it wouldn't be a waste because it would be for a greater purpose in my relationship with my wife. So what is the greater purpose of these sacrifices in Leviticus? What do they do for Israel's relationship with God? Well, the first thing they do is that they show that Israel really trusts God for their needs. If they're giving up so much, you know, to give away what you needed in order to live takes a great amount of faith that after you do that, you'll still have enough. And God, let me tell you, God loves to see his people trust him that much. Not just to say they trust him. Because it's easy for us to say we trust God. It would have been easy for Israel to say, yeah, we trust God as our provider. But to actually give away a whole bull to show that you trust him, that's a different story. It's easy to say we trust God. It's different to show. And he loves it when we show him how much we trust him. He still does today just as much as he did then. Now, it's not going to look the same, right? This doesn't mean that next Sunday we must all go down to Verda Butchery on Southfield, on Victoria Road and bring a bunch of steaks and we're going to burn them up in front of the pulpit. That's not what we're going to do.

[15:05] It doesn't look the same, but the principle is the same. How do we show today a similar faith that we trust God for our provision and show it, not just say it? How do we do that today? Well, think about what do we need in order to live in today's world? What do we need? Money, right?

Money makes the world go round. God has provided each one of us with some kind of source of income in today's world, just like he provided his people back then with cattle and grain. And therefore, God is as delighted when we take some of that money and give it back to him to show that we trust him and not ourselves to provide the things we need in our lives. And we see this all over the New Testament as well. Paul writing to Christians in Corinth in the New Testament. And the Corinthian Christians, it was an interesting case because they were apparently quite tight-fisted with their money.

You know what I mean? They kept it to themselves. They weren't very willing to give up their money. Corinth was a very commercial town. Money was a big thing. And so people hoarded a lot of money.

money. And so Paul had to teach them about money. And he takes two chapters at the end of 2 Corinthians to teach them just about giving money. And he says these words. This is from 2 Corinthians 9. You don't have to turn there. But it's from verse 7. He says, God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you to bless you abundantly so that in all things, at all times, having all you need, you will abound in every good work. Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

You see what he's saying there to those Christians who are holding their money tightly? It's quite a promise that he gives there. That he's saying if you honor God by giving money, particularly here, he will make sure you always have enough to give. That's what he's saying there. That he, you will abound so that you can be generous. He will make sure you always have enough to give. Not, now

don't misread this. He's not saying you will abound in everything you want. He's not saying God will give you everything you want. That is the prosperity gospel and the Bible never teaches that. But it does say God will give you everything he wants you to have. And that should be enough for someone who trusts him.

[18 : 03] But do you believe that? Do you believe this thing that Paul is saying? Do you believe? When he says, if you show this to God in giving, he will make sure you have enough. Do you really believe that God will make sure that you have enough? In the bottom of your heart, do you believe that?

Well, let me tell you, if you don't give money, you don't believe that. If you're not willing to give of what God has given you, you don't actually trust in his promise that when you give, you will still have enough. That is how you actually put your money where your mouth is, and you show God that I really trust you, not just say I trust you. Now, if you don't yet give anything towards God, anything back to God in any way, financially especially, I want to challenge you to try him. Try out this promise and tell me if after a few months of giving more money, tell me if you're worse off after that. I'd be really interested because I've yet to meet in over a decade of ministry, I have yet to meet one Christian who, when they have given more, they end up with less and they're worse off. I have yet to meet a Christian who can say that they were worse off after giving God more. Try him. I challenge you. And if it doesn't work, if you find yourself worse off, then stop. It's fine. After a few months, give it a trial.

God wants to prove to you that he can provide abundantly for you. But he requires that you show him that you believe that first in sacrifice. That is the first type of sacrifice that God enjoys. Sacrifices that trust his provision. The second type of sacrifice God enjoys is sacrifices that promote God's name. So this first type of sacrifice back in Leviticus here, it was called the burnt offering. And that was all burnt up. That was right down to smoke. Nothing was left. And the purpose of that was purely devotional. It was purely for people to show God that he's worth it. They trust him that much.

[20 : 32] But the second, the one we read earlier in chapter 2, was called the grain offering. And that had a portion which was burnt up, but it also had a practical purpose which wasn't burnt up, which was to make sure that the priests and the temple could continue working.

So look at verse 2 to 3. It says at the end of the... The priest... From verse 2, the priest shall take a handful of the flour and oil together with all the incense and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons. Now, Aaron and his sons are not just some random family. They were the priests. It is a most holy part of the food offerings presented to the Lord. It was holy, this part that was also given to the priests. You see, because that was a way people could contribute to the working of the tabernacle where the priests worked or what later became the temple. So people... This was generations after the people of Exodus, who had originally built the tabernacle at God's instructions. And so these generations later could continue to contribute to the working of the tabernacle just like their ancestors contributed to the building of the tabernacle.

And to show in doing that that they still valued the tabernacle. They still wanted it in their lives. And God had deliberately set it up that the Levites, they were one of the 12 tribes of Israel, but the difference between the Levites and the rest of the tribes is that they didn't own any land. So that they couldn't farm. And they couldn't invest and they couldn't have finances like the other tribes could.

And so they had to rely... The only way that they could live and work is that they had to rely on the generosity of God's people bringing these voluntary offerings at the tabernacle. And when God's people did that, they decided, I want to bring this not under compulsion, not because anyone's told me, but it's a voluntary offering. And when they did that, they were showing something profound. They were showing that they wanted worship at the temple to continue. And that they wanted God's name to continue to be lifted up and for him to be known in the world. When they made these offerings to the priests, they were showing what they valued, what they wanted to happen. And God loved it when he saw his people prioritize that in their lives. And he still does today.

[23 : 18] He still loves it when he sees his people prioritizing the ministry of his word and his name being magnified and known in the world. So how do we do that? How do we show that we value that in our world? Well, we give towards ministry. Simple. We give towards the church. We give

towards the ministry of God's word going out there.

Now, giving, which is a very popular, common topic in the New Testament, because why does Paul and the rest of them have to write about it so much? Because we don't like giving, okay? I can already see when I talk about money, people are like, you should see your faces sometimes when I talk about money. No, no, that's uncomfortable. Of course it is. It's giving stuff that we would want to enjoy for ourselves.

And so, but the Bible talks about it a lot because it's something that, it's one of the last things. You know, a pastor once told me in running a church, you know, he's talking about church finances. And he said, if you look at how church finances go, normally they follow a few, a rise in finances will follow a few years after a rise in attendance because he said, the wallet is the last thing to convert in many people. You know, we can convert our hearts, we can sing songs, but when it comes to like changing our giving patterns, that takes a long time.

Anyway, this is a way you see that we show God that this is important, not just in our lives, but in our, in our world. It's necessary, by the way, Christian giving is Christians giving money to the church is necessary for the church to happen. We don't have any outside funding in St. Mark's. Everything we do is based on the contributions of everyone sitting here now. That's all. And it's necessary so that we who minister can do the job of pastoring, of sitting down, of marriage counseling, of preparing sermons, of running the church. You know, we, we don't just work on Sundays. We actually work a full week's job to, to make this all happen. And it requires money, of course. But it's not the only reason Christians give, not just because it's necessary. It's also a way that you show God that his name being proclaimed in this world is important to you. More important than what you could have otherwise done with that money. Paul writes to the Philippians, who were naturally much more generous than the

[26 : 09] Corinthians were. And so he writes this to them. Of they already, because they, the moment they heard the gospel, they were like, Paul, how can we help? You need to travel to Rome? Sure, we'll help you.

You need, you need food? You need a shelter? Sure, we'll help you. And they started to give and give. Later on, Paul writes a letter to them, partly to thank them. And he says this at the end of Philippians from verse 18, he says, I am amply supplied. Now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, they are, listen to this, he says, they are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. You see, as Christians give money to ministry, it's the same pleasing aroma to the Lord as it was in Leviticus. And God makes sure that the people who give still have enough.

But, now I'm not just talking about money, and this is not just talking about money. It's not just money that God enjoys his people giving. Notice back in Leviticus something important in verse 1 of this grain offering. So, Leviticus 2 verse 1, it says, when anyone brings a grain offering to the Lord, their offering is to be of the finest flour. The finest flour. Now, they could not just go to spa and buy a bag of flour. They had to make it. Have you ever made flour? Do you know what is involved in making flour? Tilling the land, plowing the land, irrigating the land, sowing, harvesting, drying out the grain, crushing it, threshing it, grinding it, milling it, and only then, and then it has to be not just any, but the finest flour. It took a lot of time. It took a lot of talent.

Which means, God's people honored him with their time and their talents as well as their resources. And today still, God delights when his people put their time and their talents into the work of magnifying his name in the world. And we all have different talents. God has given us all different gifts and different talents and experience. And he delights when we use that, not just for ourselves, but for him and for his work and for his name to be glorified in this world. And if you are not using the talents God has given you in any way for his name and his ministry, come speak to us. Our job is to help you to know how you can fit in and how you can use the unique gifts and talents God has given you for the work of ministry. It's not just the pastors. In fact, Ephesians tells us the pastor's job is to equip the saints, you, for the works of ministry by slotting in your talents and time and energy into God's work in this world. So that's the second type. Now, before we end, I just want to quickly look at the third type of sacrifice from these chapters that God enjoys. And that is sacrifice that declares his value.

Now, if I, and I don't want to, but if I got a record of your monthly spend of your money, and I saw exactly what you spend every rand on, I would, I would just from that get a pretty good idea of what

is important to you in your life, right? Just by looking at how you spend your money. What we are willing to spend our money on, especially our disposable income, declares what we value to those around us. You know, if you see someone driving past in a flashy car, and you often get, you know, in Plumstead, you get those really loud cars that just, and drive past, and they just look at my car, everyone, look at how fancy I am. I can already, I don't even need to meet that person. I can already tell something about them, right? Just from that, I can know something about what's important to that person based on how they've spent their money. And it's the same for any of us. You can tell something about someone when we make sacrifices of our money for that thing, and you can tell something about someone when they make sacrifices for God that cost them something.

[30 : 52] And you see in these sacrifices in Leviticus that God actually takes the value as important as well. It's got a cost. It's not just something that we can give away that we don't really notice. It's something that actually we feel that costs us, because when we make those types of sacrifices, that declares what is important to us. And that is why in Leviticus, God enjoys it when people give not just any bull or goat, but did you notice, the best one. That's what God asks for, the best one. Look at chapter 1 verse 3 again. He says, if the offering is a burnt offering from the Lord, you are to offer a male without defect.

Okay? Those are the God's specifications for the bull. A male and without defect. Why a male? Well, because in breeding, the male bull was by far much more valuable than the females, and without blemish.

So, in other words, you couldn't just take the smallest bull that you had. You had to take the best one. You had to pick out of your herd. You had to pick the best one to take to the sacrifice, the one that cost the most, the one that hurt the most to give away. But that was a way of declaring, God is worth it. God is worth my best. But also notice, now this is awesome, notice God's grace to those who couldn't afford that. Because as we read on, in each of these sacrifices, there's not just one option.

You didn't have to bring a bull. There was a sliding scale. If you couldn't bring a bull, verse 10, if the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, then you are to bring a male without defect. If you couldn't afford a sheep, well then, verse 14, if it's an offering of birds, you are to offer a dove or a young pigeon. So, this teaches us that God did not expect the same from everyone because He knew people had different circumstances and different resources. And so, what God wants to do here is He wants to make it possible for anyone to bring a meaningful sacrifice to Him. And He is equally delighted in it as long as it is their best that they are bringing. It's why Jesus, do you remember, was delighted with that poor widow at the temple? Do you remember that? That poor widow at the temple brought just two coins? That was far less than these rich people were bringing. But Jesus looks at His disciples and He says, you know what? She brought the most the most because she sacrificed the most because that was all she had. And Jesus was delighted in that. It really touched Him. And so, the point is here, God does not want Israel to skimp with Him.

[33 : 53] If you can afford a bull, don't bring a pigeon. And it's the same today. We should never ask, what is the least that I have to bring to God in terms of my money or my time?

We should never skimp with our God. And yet, we do, don't we? Let's be honest. We tend to do that when we're thinking of how much of our time and how much of our money to give towards God's work. We tend to skimp and go, well, what do I have to give? I've often been asked, you know, what percentage do I have to give to church? Or how long does the prayer meeting go on?

You know, when's it going to end? Or do I have to go to it? We really shouldn't be asking those kind of questions because those are skimpy questions. That's skimping with God. That's saying, do I have to bring a bull? Can I just bring a pigeon? We tend to do that with God, don't we?

But imagine we did that with someone we loved. Husbands, imagine you were taking your wife out for a date. But as you're sitting there, you're looking at your watch the whole time going, how long does this have to go on? How long is this going to take? Then you look at the menu and you go, how much do I spend so that you feel loved? You know? I mean, how would she feel? How would you feel if someone did that? How do you think God feels when we do that with Him?

In fact, you don't have to imagine how God feels. He's told us how He feels because you know what? Israel ended up doing that with Him. And in the last book of the Old Testament, He tells us how that makes Him feel. Malachi 1, from the end of verse 6, He says this, it is you priests who

show contempt for my name. But you ask, how have we shown contempt for your name?

[36 : 02] When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor. Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you? Says the Lord Almighty. I mean, he makes a good point, doesn't he?

You know, what Israel were giving to God, they would never even give to people that they respect. They were being cheap with God because they thought they could. But what it was, was actually a sign that they didn't value Him in their lives. But do you know what he goes on to say here?

This is the last book of the Old Testament. Look what he says a few verses later in Malachi. I will just listen. We'll have it on screen. After considering how little and scant and how, you know, how cheap the Israelites were being with Him, he says this, my name will be great among the nations from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place, incense and pure offerings will be brought to me because my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord Almighty. You know who he's talking about there? Us. He's saying to the Israelites, I'm going to raise a people in this world over all the world who are going to be delighted to offer me sacrifices, unlike you people, he says to the Israelites. He's talking about us. He's talking about those who are saved through Christ around the world, the true Israel, who will offer better sacrifices and not reluctantly but joyfully and out of real love for God because of what he's done for them. And that is why in Hebrews we read these words to Christians, through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that openly profess his name, and do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices,

God is pleased. Still today, God is pleased with such practical sacrifices of sharing and to do good in the world and in the lives of other people. Sacrificially, that actually costs us. Christians are called to see those sacrifices of our time and our money not as a burden, but as opportunities to show God how much we love him and how much we value him. Opportunities to worship that God delights in sacrifice. When we when we sacrifice, when we in our lives give up time and money to help others and to to show our love for God and to to promote his name, that is worship. That is as much, if not more, worship than us standing here on Sunday and singing songs. That is worship. That's why Romans 12 verse 1 puts it that way. It says, therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice which is holy and pleasing to God. Then he says, this is your true and proper worship, because when we sacrifice in our lives, that's when we're speaking God's language.

And so, as I close, think what sacrifices God is perhaps calling you to make in your life as a way of showing him that you really trust him as your provider. Or what sacrifices maybe he may, maybe he's calling you to make in your life that that show him that you desire that his name is known and you want to invest in mission work and ministry. Or simply sacrifices to declare that he's worth more to you than what you have. I can't tell you what those sacrifices will be, but I think you know.

[39 : 51] Because those sacrifices, when you give of your time and your money for God and for his people, they are still today an aroma in your life that God delights in. Let's pray that we will be a people of sacrifice.

O Lord, we come before you and we thank you that you sacrificed yourself to save sinners like us.

O Lord, help us to respond in what we know from Leviticus pleases you.

O Lord, help us to do in sacrifices, joyful, voluntary sacrifices that trust in your provision, that promote your name, and that declare your value in our lives. Help us each to go out of this place and know what that will look like in our weeks and months to come. We pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen.